LAURA BIGGAR AND HER OWN STORY—TOLD FOR THE FIRST TIME BY THE WOMAN CHARGED WITH A GREAT CONSPIRACY.

Eventful Episodes in Life of Actress Who Says Bennett Millions Rightfully Belong to Her.

Aside From Experience of Stage, and the Prominence Which the Courts Have Brought, Hers Is an Interesting Personality.

LAURA BIGGAR AND HER SON JAMES WILLIS MC. CONNELL

LAURA BIGGAR,
From Her Latest Photograph.

CASE IN BRIEF.

Laura Biggar, after her retirement from the stage several years ago, lived with aged Henry Bennett, millionaire, acting as his nurse and companion.

Upon his death he left her nearly half of his fortune. She put in a widow's claim for the entire estate, claiming that they had been secretly married.

She produced a child, which she averred had been born shortly after his death. In the legal controversy which followed she was charged with conspiracy, and the doctor who attended her and the Justice of the Peace who attested to her marriage were placed under arrest.

Warrants were issued for her also. She has not yet surrendered herself, but says she will do so if indicted by the Grand Jury.

LAURA BIGGER MAKING UP FOR THE WIDOW IN "A TRIP TO CHINA TOWN."

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

Dramatic indeed is the true, strange story of "One Woman's Life."

In the beginning it was a romance, like all others, for it began with love.

It began with love and found love's old, sad end—despair, death, even worse.

It began years ago in a baby's cradle, at Wilmington, Del.

Its scene changed from the simple Quaker homestead—where strife was shut out and love shut in—to the Friends' School.

Then to every town and city in the United States, and finally to a home in New York, where a woman waits in hourly expectation for a summons to prison.

It is a strange and unsual story of a woman who risked a fortune by a single throw in this game of chance, and lo! "for what?"

"For vindication," says Laura Biggar-Bennett.

And this is her own story:

"I have been called a conspirator," said Laura Biggar-Bennett, half recklessly, half sadly, "and I am waiting, waiting for my indictment by the Grand Jury; then I shall deliver myself up to the authorities.

Although she spoke gayly, vivaciously, there was a ring of bravado about it, although Mrs. Henry M. Bennett has the priceless gift of seeing the bright side of life.

Gay as she was, vivacious as she tried to be, under it all were the signs of tears, which refused to be concealed even by the greatest weapon that a woman can wield—pride.

Her tawny hair framed a kindly smiling face. Her eyes were blue, earnest and sympathetic.

They darkened when she became interested, until they appeared almost as dark as their lashes.

She had perfect taste in dress; she wore a quiet, appropriate garb in keeping with her seclusion.

"I do wish it were finished," she continued wearily, "I am so tired—so tired.

"As everybody knows, I was born in Wilmington, Del., she continued.

"My mother was a Quaker, and very strongly objected to my public ambitions.

"Indeed, she always encouraged me to avoid the vanities of life, and very early sent me to the Friends' School in Wilmington, because I became too unmanageable for my governess.

"I was the only child, and, of course, was allowed to rule those who had a great affection for me, especially my mother, of whom I was exceedingly fond.

MOTHER PLACED HER IN FRIENDS' SCHOOL.

"All the joy went out of my life when she died, ten years ago, for, of all my friends, she was the only one who understood and really loved me.

"She was anxious for me to cultivate my mind, but discouraged ostentatious display.

"Music and the languages she insisted upon, and when I was placed in the Friends' School her first admonition was:

"'Laura, thee must follow the ways of thy mother and not give up to the wicked pomps of life.'

"But the dramatic was my earliest and most natural inclination, fostered from my first visit to a circus, to which my mother would not take me.

"She even considered it sacrilegious to read the posters.

"It was always my delight to play theatricals with my playmates, and when I graduated from the Quaker school at the age of 14 years, I gave dramatic readings in a concert company for church benefits.

"At that time I was sent to Philadelphia to study under Professor Everest, cultivating my voice in preparation for a more technical training with Marchesi, in Paris.

"But fate willed it otherwise. I made a visit to New York, and was persuaded to have my voice tried by an operatic company.

"Perhaps I would have gone on the stage then, but my mother at this point interfered and took me home.

"Then began days and nights of anxious pleadings to be allowed to give vent to the genius which I knew I possessed, and finally one day I read in a paper the following advertisement:

"'Wanted—An amateur actress, with money, to star jointly with well-known star.'

"I felt that this was my opportunity, and urged mother to allow me to answer it.

"Of course, she tried to dissuade me, but I coaxed and coaxed, until she decided to let me meet the 'penniless star.'

"The tour the company went upon continued three or four months, and then my mother left me, after gaining the manager's promise to send me home in two weeks.

"Of course, the sudden determination of my mother to take me off the stage was a blow to my ambition, and after she left I confided my troubles to the leading man.

"It seemed hard that I was to finish my career in just two weeks.

MARRIED J. W. McCONNELL, LEADING MAN OF THE COMPANY.

"He consoled me by saying:

"'If you marry me you needn't go back to your mother. I'll take you to California and make a star of you.'

"That was a happy idea, as I thought, and straightway wrote to mother of my intention to be married, if she would consent.

"We were at Winnipeg, Manitoba, and I had, so I thought, sufficient time for an answer from my mother before the date set for the wedding.

"I waited impatiently, and as the days passed grew restless at the delay and began to telegraph.

"Sunday was set for the wedding, to which the whole company was invited, when I told my fiance that I would not marry without mother's consent.

"'But I've already ordered the supper,' he said. That settled it—he had ordered the supper, and that night, at the age of 17, I was married to J. W. McConnell.

"The next morning mother's telegram, delayed by severe storms then raging in Canada, reached me.

"It was too late, and I continued my trip to California with my husband.

"When I reached San Francisco I opened in the title role of 'Snowflake' at the Grand Opera-house, after which I retired from the stage for a time.

"My next theatrical venture was with Thomas's Opera Company, followed by an engagement at the Tivoli.

"William A. Brady, in his first venture as a manager, engaged my husband and myself for a six weeks' tour.

"We played continuously for three years all over the United States.

"On our first Eastern tour, Mr. Bennett first saw me, and during the next two years never failed to see a performance when we happened to be in the same town.

"I refused to see him at this time, because he was married.

"But he did not lessen his importunities on that account, sending flowers and tokens frequently and importuning me by letter to meet him.

"Soon after this I went West to visit my mother, who lived on a ranch in the wilds of California, which was fully fifteen miles from the nearest town.

"For nearly five months I saw no one but the Indians, who were the laborers, until one day a fortune teller made us a visit.

FORTUNE TELLER SPOKE OF WHITE-HAIRED MAN.

"'She said: 'There is a white-haired old man who is in your life, and he will be the controlling power.

"'He has seen you many, many times, and thinks of you constantly.

"'He is married now, but one day you will meet, and know him. It is written in your palm, child. He is rich.

"'You will derive great benefits from him and some day you will marry him.'

"I was divorced at this time and paid but little attention to the gypsy's prophecy until years after its fulfillment.

"I met Mr. Bennett first in New York. His wife was living and he still persisted in paying me attention, which I conscientiously refused.

"However, for five years, he watched my career and offered assistance financially at any time, so he said, that I should require it.

"In October of 1897, Mrs. Bennett, his wife, died. I was out West at this time, but Mr. Bennett apprised me of her death by telegram.

"Immediately following this came a letter importuning an early marriage; that he had loved me madly for seven years, and urging his advanced age as an excuse for an immediate wedding.

"I thought long and carefully over his proposal and finally decided to marry him with the condition which he named—that the wedding was to be kept a secret until some time had elapsed after Mrs. Bennett's death.

"I had worked strenuously for thirteen years. I was tired out in body and soul, traveling and stopping at one-night stands and enduring the vicissitudes of theatrical uncertainties, which only those who have had them can appreciate.

"My boy by my first marriage was in his teens, and needed the advantages of education that I feared I would not be able to give him, and it was after an earnest consideration of these conditions that I decided to marry Mr. Bennett secretly.

"I needed the rest and the home that had long been denied me, and did probably what most women would do in my circumstances, married with that end in view.

"Mr. Bennett was always kind to my boy, and, while he was a man of many peculiarities, he was unfailing in his kindness to me.

"We lived from April until July of each year upon the Windsor stock farm, which he hoped to convert into a beautiful estate, and planned until the day before his death to improve it with drives and lawns.

"Nothing pleased him so much as open admiration for me expressed by others. It pleased his vanity, and to this end all who knew him well and sought to gain their ends began by praising me.

AGED HUSBAND PROUD OF YOUNG WIFE.

"The servants at the old farm grew to love me and for the first time in their lives received a Christmas present from Mr. Bennett on the Christmas before his death.

"He was a man of peculiar whims. He bought me a typewriter and insisted that I learn to operate the machine.

"After that I answered all of his letters and transacted other business, besides doing all of his cooking, and, while he was an invalid, was constantly at his bedside.

"My miseries multiplied in the last year, and I surely measured time by heart throbs. The friends who had greatest cause to protect me suddenly became indifferent when I needed their sympathy, and this ingratitude has been the hardest part of all to endure.

"I only asked for that which was due me—the right to establish my wifehood and the legitimacy of my child, born after Mr. Bennett's death.

"I was contented when the Justice of the Peace swore in court that he had married us, and Doctor Hendrick testified to the birth of our child.

"I asked my lawyers to drop all proceedings, saying I was amply provided for and since the validity of my marriage was established I had nothing to wish for.

"Then the other side cried conspiracy. Then said the marriage certificate was fraudulent and that a child had not been born; that I was avaricious and wanted the whole estate. This is untrue.

"I am fighting for the tardy respect that must be given me.

"My son was in St. John's Academy, at Fordham, until the curiosity of pupils influenced him to run away from school to hunt for me in my trouble.

"Then the trustees refused to take him back, and I think their action has been more on account of their fear of notoriety than an infringement of school discipline.

"I am constantly in receipt of letters from unknown men, letters begging money, urging that I am rich and the writers are poor, and then there are other letters, letters of sentiment."

S. MARGERY PETERS IS LUCKIEST UNLUCKY GIRL.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

Seven, lucky number seven, figuring conspicuously in the life of S. Marjory Peters, may explain to those who believe in lucky numbers why she has been regarded as "the luckiest unlucky girl in the world," with the facts to bear them out.

Even those who are skepitcal of superstition concede that some influence surrounded her when, as a little girl, she fell, unluckily, from the roof of a three-story house, on which she was playing, and landed upon a brick sidewalk, luckily, marvelously luckily, without breaking a bone—a fall which would have killed any one else.

Strange it is, true it is, nevetheless, that in all her history there seems to be a contest raging between her unlucky angel and her lucky angel, in which the good angel always wins, neutralising the evil effects of the bad, and her friends believe it is due to the mystical seven.

Miss Peters is one of the prettiest girls of Newark, N. J., of the younger set. She is 15 years old and comes of a very good family. Her father is Mr. John Ward Peters of "George Peters's," at one time the largest harness manufacturer in the world.

Miss Peters's mother was Appiess Rebecca Bynum of the Bynums of North Carolina, known in that section of the country since before the Revolution.

It was her grandfather who became a warm friend of the Cherokee Indians by fair treatment and a purchase of their land after the manner of William Penn. When he fell ill and a trip through the West was necessary to prolong his life, his Cherokee Indian friends hearing of it and having been compelled by the Government to take a reservation in the Indian Territory, asked the old gentleman to come out and live with them, which he did. His wife was a Dupree of the French line.

The fall which first called attention to the fact that Marjory Peters was under the special protection of a good angel and was the luckiest unlucky girl in the world occurred about five years ago.

At that time her parents were living in Banks street. Next door to her lived "Mattie" Douglas, a lass of 10 years, who was her playmate. The front part of the house was four stories in height, but the rear wall was only three.

The children were playing on this three-story extension, protected by a hand rail running around the edge of the roof.

Little Marjory was gayly swinging on a rope and having a beautiful time, when the treacherous cord broke, and she rolled over the edge of the roof.

"Mattie," seeing her friend's desperate fall, ran screaming into the house to tell her mother. They found the little one lying on her side in the areaway, unconscious, but still breathing, and carried her into the house.

Mrs. Peters was sent for and when she entered the room Marjory opened her eyes. The distracted mother, not realizing what she was doing, commanded her to get out of bed.

"Stand up for mother," she cried, and Marjory stood on her feet for one instant and then lapsed into unconsciousness again.

The doctors were nonplused when they made an examination. Instead of the broken bones they expected to find the only thing that showed how severe had been the fall was a bruised and scraped side.

When it was explained to them that she had gone through the air for a distance of thirty-seven feet, narrowly escaping some projecting beams, which had she struck them would have killed her instantly—

When it was known that she had struck the bricks without anything to break her fall, one of the doctors shook his head and exclaimed:

"That girl bears a charmed life."

As it happened a full-grown man fell from a scaffold the same day, almost at the same hour. He fell only twenty feet, but it killed him. In speaking of her awful fall Miss Peters said the other day:

"I will never forget it. I remember on that day, just a little while before I fell, I peered over the side of the house into the street below, and thought how dreadful it would be if a person should fall.

"When the rope broke, and I rolled over the side of the coping, I knew what was happening to me, and the realization of it made me faint. They told me afterwards that I screamed three times, but I do not remember uttering a sound.

MISS MARJORY PETERS.

"When I woke up I heard mamma's voice saying, 'Stand up for mother, Marjory,' and I stood up and tried to put my arms around her neck. Then my side hurt me so much that I fainted again."

One cannot have a serious fall without sustaining some injury, no matter how faithful may be one's guardian angel. The effects upon Miss Peters were great.

She was ill in bed for many months, and required constant attention. When at last she was able to be abroad it was found that she had received so serious a shock to her nervous system that she was unable to sustain an endeavor for any length of time.

School was out of the question. Whenever she went to school, or attempted to concentrate her mind on a given task, she was attacked with a violent headache, and compelled to stop. So she did not have to go to school—lucky unlucky girl!

Her mother took her education in hand and taught her everything she knows. She can play the piano, sing, sew, dance, read, write and figger," and is something of a botanist besides.

On account of her fall she has escaped all the roughness of a mixed school, and received the best of training at her mother's knee. Good luck, therefore, came out of bad luck, and then it was discovered that the mystic number seven was intimately connected with her in many ways, and to its influence is attributed the contradictory experiences of her life and the luck that saved her.

It is a curious fact that there are seven letters in her given name of Marjory, as there are seven letters in the last name of her playmate, Douglas.

Her mother was just 21 years old when Marjory was born, being three times seven, and her father is a seventh son and was born in a house with the number 21 on the door.

When her mother was the same age as the child she had a fall from a tree to a stone pavement. But her destiny was not influenced in any mystical number, and she sustained a fractured arm and a broken nose.

Even the year of her birth contained the lucky number. She was born on January 24, 1887. And the accident, the big accident of her life—for she has had many smaller ones—occurred ten year later, in 1897.

Her grandmother, for whom she is named, Mrs. Sarah M. Peters, lives in Newark.

When she was 7 years old Marjory had a foretaste of the terrible fall which was to come three years later.

She was playing "baseball" with her father and mother in the garden attached to the house. During the "game" her father swung the bat and accidentally hit her upon the head. She was rendered unconscious for the same length of time that she was afterwards unconscious as a result of the fall.

In the year 1897 she had a series of accidents. A waitor at a summer hotel spilled a cup of boiling coffee over her and severely scalded her.

She atetmpted to cross the street in pursuit of her brother Drew's fleeing baseball and was run over by a bicycle.

Later she fell against an iron fence and broke the corners of her front teeth. Then came the fall from the roof, all in one year.

Several years before 1897 an astrologer who visited the house became interested in the flaxen-haired girl, and cast her horoscope. He would not tell what he had found in store for her, but he told her mother to look out for serious trouble in the year ending with a seven.

And now her relatives are wondering what will happen to Marjory in the next year that contains a seven—1907.

FOREST AND STEPHEN RODDY,

Sons of R. A. Roddy, a prominent merchant of Centralia, Mo. The boys have planned to make an overland trip to St. Louis to see the World's Fair. They will travel in a cart drawn by these calves. Their pets will be 3 years old in 1904. The animals were trained by the lads.